

veto this bill and why many of us would vote to sustain that bill, about our concern that it is called a program for the near-poor or the working-poor uninsured children, and it turns out it's not for the near-poor or working-poor uninsured children.

As we've demonstrated in this discussion tonight, it covers people who make up to \$60,000 and in some cases \$80,000 and more a year. It's not for the uninsured because the original study shows 61 percent of those who became eligible already had private insurance, and under the new bill, one out of every two who become eligible will have already had private insurance, and they'll drop that insurance. And when they do, the cost of the private insurance for everybody else, everyone else who has a child in that private insurance, will go up.

It turns out so it's not for the poor or the near-poor or the working poor. It's not for the uninsured, because we discover it makes millions, 2 million by the latest estimate, children who are already privately insured eligible to go on this program. Then you think, well, the children's health care bill has to be for children and you discover, shock of all shock, the children's health care program isn't for children; it's for adults.

I thank the gentleman. I think the 22 million new smokers is a stunning fact. I'm sorry we haven't been able to offer amendments on the floor. I'm glad this debate gives us a chance to explain to the American people what's going on, and that there's more to this bill than just the title, and it's important to pay attention to these details.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2262, HARDBLOCK MINING AND RECLAMATION ACT OF 2007

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida (during Special Order of Mr. SHADEGG), from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 110-416) on the resolution (H. Res. 780) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2262) to modify the requirements applicable to locatable minerals on public domain lands, consistent with the principles of self-initiation of mining claims, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 3920, TRADE AND GLOBALIZATION ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2007

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida (during Special Order of Mr. SHADEGG), from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 110-417) on the resolution (H. Res. 781) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 3920) to amend the Trade Act of 1974 to reauthorize trade adjustment assistance, to extend trade adjustment assistance to

service workers and firms, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

BLUE DOG COALITION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, this evening, as most Tuesday evenings, I rise on behalf of the 47-member-strong, fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition.

As I sat here, Mr. Speaker, thinking about what I wanted to discuss in this next hour with some of my Blue Dog colleagues, I couldn't help but listen to some of the rhetoric that we've heard over the past hour. You know, for 6 years, for 6 years the Republicans controlled the White House, the House and the Senate. And what did they give us? They gave us tax cut after tax cut for folks earning over \$400,000 a year.

And this new Democratic majority, what has the Democrats given you? We are giving you health care for children of working parents. Let me repeat that. This is health care for the children of working parents. This is not for children whose parents are on welfare. They're already covered under a program known as Medicaid, which is health insurance for the poor, the disabled and the elderly.

Some 10 million children in America will go to bed tonight without health insurance, without the ability to go to the doctor when they get sick. And who are they? They're the children of parents who are trying to do the right thing and stay off welfare, but they're working the jobs with no benefits.

While the Republicans were hiding earmarks, the Democrats in this new majority have been passing legislation that says if you're a Member of Congress and if you break the law, you lose your pension, period. And while the Republicans have been on an agenda that benefits those earning over \$400,000 a year, the Democrats in this new majority have raised the Federal minimum wage for the first time in 10 years.

If we're serious about moving people from welfare to work, we've got to pay them more than \$10,712 a year, which is what the previous minimum wage represented if you worked 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, never get sick, and never take a single day off for vacation.

Now, they said that the Democrats are wanting to provide health insurance for children of working parents. We plead guilty to that, and after all, if the working families have been benefiting from some of these tax cuts that primarily benefited those earning over \$400,000 a year for the past 6 years, our working families might not need the help, but they do because under the past 6 years of a Republican White

House, House and Senate, quite frankly, they haven't got it.

It's time, Mr. Speaker, to tone down the political rhetoric and look at the facts, and as a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, I can tell you what we're all about. We're about fiscal discipline and accountability. We're about putting an end to the partisan bickering. We don't care if it's a Democrat or Republican idea. We ask ourselves, is it a common-sense idea and does it make sense for the people that send us here to be their voice?

Today, the U.S. national debt is \$9,063,547,746,613. If you divide that enormous number by every man, woman and child in America, including the children being born today, every one of us, our share of the national debt, \$29,888. That's what those of us in the Blue Dog Coalition refer to as the debt tax, D-E-B-T, which is one tax that cannot be cut, cannot go away until we get our Nation's fiscal house in order.

Tonight, we're going to be talking about the debt, the deficit, and as members of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, we're going to be talking about ways to put an end to this reckless spending.

If you ask 100 people on the street what they think about this Iraq war policy, you will get about 100 different answers, but one of the things that unites us as Blue Dogs is we believe that the money that this administration asks for for Iraq should be accounted for. We believe that if this President is going to continue to spend, and this is year 5, if this President is going to continue to spend \$16 million an hour, \$16 million every 60 minutes going to Iraq, and if this President's going to continue down that path, then we believe we're not here tonight to debate the merits of \$16 million an hour going to Iraq, but we're here tonight to hold this administration accountable for how that money is being spent and to ensure that it's being spent not on projects for Iraq but providing the protection and the state-of-the-art equipment that our brave and honorable men and women in uniform not only need but deserve.

This war has affected all of us. My first cousin was in Iraq when his wife gave birth to their first child. He's now back for a second time, and he will be there when she gives birth to their third child. My family's not any different from many families across America.

Many families have made the sacrifice, some of them the ultimate sacrifice, in support of their loved ones who have gone and simply done what they've been asked to do. And Mr. Speaker, if we're going to send our men and women in uniform to Iraq, we need to make sure some of this money is being spent on them, and we need to make sure that we're taking care of them.

At this time, one of the things that the Blue Dog Coalition has done is

we've written legislation known as H. Res. 97 that was drafted by members of the Blue Dog Coalition to ensure accountability for how the money is being spent in Iraq. At this time, I would call on one of the cochairs, the cochair for policy for the Blue Dog Coalition, and that is my dear friend, the cochair for policy for the fiscally conservative Blue Dogs, and this is DENNIS MOORE of Kansas who's going to talk more to us this evening about H. Res. 97, which simply is called, Providing for Operation Iraqi Freedom Cost Accountability, and I thank Congressman MOORE for being a part of this Special Order this evening.

Mr. MOORE of Kansas. I thank Congressman ROSS, and Mr. Speaker, for letting us speak this evening.

The Blue Dogs, as Congressman ROSS said, have introduced H. Res. 97, Providing for Operation Iraqi Freedom Cost Accountability, to address the lack of oversight and accountability with regard to our Federal Government's funding of the war in Iraq.

H. Res. 97 currently has 63 cosponsors, myself included, and puts forward commonsense proposals that ensure future transparency and accountability in the funding of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This, I believe, is an important first step toward making sure that more resources get to our troops in the field and are not wasted on other things. We want to make sure that our brave men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan have what they need to do their job.

H. Res. 97 focuses on four crucial points for demanding fiscal responsibility in Iraq: number 1, a call for transparency on how Iraq War funds are spent; number 2, the creation of a Truman Commission to investigate the awarding of contracts to make sure they are fairly awarded and get what they're intended to secure; number 3, a requirement to fund the Iraq war through the normal appropriations process and not through emergency supplementals as we have done throughout this whole war; and number 4, using American resources to improve Iraqi assumption of internal policing operations.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, members of the Blue Dog Coalition worked together with House Armed Services Committee Chairman IKE SKELTON of Missouri to include key provisions of H. Res. 97 in the fiscal year 2008 national defense authorization bill. In doing so, we took the first step toward ensuring complete fiscal transparency in the funding of the war in Iraq.

The American people deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent and that they're being spent wisely and that our troops have the resources they need to do their job and to protect themselves in the field.

The Blue Dogs, Mr. Speaker, are committed to passing legislation that accomplishes this goal, to give our troops what they need and make sure they have the resources they need to protect themselves as well.

Mr. Speaker, I've been a member of the Blue Dog group for more than 9 years now, and in that period of time I have learned, and I've said this to my folks back home over and over and over again, 80 percent, 85 percent of what we do up here in Congress should not be about Democrats and Republicans. We ought to be working for our people and for our country. And when I say that back home, I see people every time and in the audience sitting there shaking their heads yes. They're tired of the partisanship up here. They want us working together to do what's right for our people and our country.

I have now eight grandchildren, Mr. Speaker, and we have mortgaged their future. Mr. ROSS had a chart up here just a few minutes ago that showed we have a national debt in excess of \$9 trillion, and we're passing that debt, Mr. Speaker, on to our children and grandchildren. To me that is immoral.

We ought to change the way we're doing business here in Congress and do like most families. Most American families live within a budget, not all but most, and we should be doing the same thing. That's what our Blue Dog organization is all about, making sure that we, as a Nation, try to live and do live within the resources that we have and not pass this debt on to our children and grandchildren.

I thank Congressman ROSS.

□ 1845

Mr. ROSS. The gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MOORE) is the cochair of policy of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition.

As you can see, the 2007 Iraqi war funding, the total cost, \$135.2 billion; the cost per month, \$11.3 billion; the cost per day, \$370 million. That's about \$16 million an hour. I helped dedicate and break ground on interstate I-530, which someday will connect I-30 and I-40 in Little Rock through Pine Bluff to I-69 in southeast Arkansas, which could create a economic revival in one of the poorest regions of the country, the delta region.

In my speech in Pine Bluff yesterday I couldn't help but point out in the last transportation reauthorization bill there was about \$6 billion for new interstate construction for all of America for the next 5 years. That's about the amount we will spend in Iraq in the next 2 weeks.

Don't get me wrong, let me make it very clear, as long as we have troops in harm's way, I am going to support them and make sure we support them as a Nation in providing them the very best that money can buy and the technology and the equipment they need to do their job as safely as possible and return home to their families. We have to ask ourselves at some point, \$16 million an hour going to Iraq means \$16 million an hour we don't have to invest in our communities in America, that we don't have to invest in education and homeland security and veterans benefits, and the list is endless.

At some point, at some point we have to demand a new direction in Iraq and begin to invest in America again.

At this time, I would recognize our administrative cochair of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, and that's my good friend, ALLEN BOYD from Florida.

Mr. BOYD. I want to thank my friend MIKE ROSS from Arkansas, the communications cochair of the 47 member strong fiscally conservative Blue Dog Democrats.

I came down here tonight to join him to try to continue to deliver the message to the American people that I think in some ways this administration and this Congress have lost their focus on what's important to keep America great and strong.

I noticed today that the President of the United States and the minority leader and the minority whip stood before the American people and talked about vetoing an appropriations bill which funds the health and education agencies of our Federal Government simply because that bill would increase spending over last year at a rate, I think, of some \$9 billion or \$10 billion, which is actually below inflationary and population increases. At the same time, the President of the United States has sent in a supplemental request down here for funding for the Iraq war, which I believe is to the tune of \$49 billion or \$50 billion to get us through the next few months.

I think we have just lost our sense of balance, or our sense of what we have to do to keep America strong and keep it a great Nation. I want to refer, if I could, if we think about those numbers, about an agency of the Federal Government that helps provide health care and education benefits to the people of the United States of America, while we are thinking about that, I want to refer you to a recent report released by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. In that report, we uncovered the waste, fraud and abuse of taxpayers' dollars caused by the lack of necessary oversight by the U.S. Government. This is something that the Blue Dogs have been focused on for a long time, is the government, we as a government being good stewards of our taxpayers' dollars that we take involuntarily from our citizens to run the government, to provide security, transportation and other things, the other functions of a government.

This quarterly report, which details progress in the U.S. Government's reconstruction of Iraq, uncovers continuing problems which have left millions of dollars, billions of dollars unaccounted for and a large number of products unfinished in Iraq. In fact, the Inspector General himself has stated that 40 percent of all projects in Iraq are in danger of not being completed under the original contract and "virtually every project in Iraq has cost more or taken longer than expected."

The Inspector General also noted that some projects are never finished.

In one recent case, the Federal Government invested \$90 million in a project to overhaul two giant turbines at a plant south of Baghdad. However, the multimillion dollar project, which is critical to providing power in Baghdad, has not been realized because of weak operations and maintenance practices by the Iraqis after the project was turned over in April of 2006.

This report goes on to cite several examples of the same egregious waste, fraud, and abuse. I want to outline some of those; I want to give you six specific examples of the waste, fraud, and abuse identified in this Inspector General report.

Number one was a 50-bed children's hospital in Basra, a 50-bed children's hospital in Basra, Iraq, which was originally expected to cost \$50 million. This might be appropriate, because we have heard the previous speakers in the previous hour talk about how SCHIP ought to be vetoed, SCHIP, which would provide health care services to our children here.

We just spent \$50 million in Iraq on a children's hospital. That hospital is a full year behind schedule. The contractor responsible for the project left the hospital only about half complete, yet 100 percent over the original cost estimate. We haven't heard a lot of fuss about that from the previous majority.

Number two, due to inefficient oversight by the State Department, the Federal Government spent \$44 million on a residential camp for refugees that has never been used. Another \$36 million was spent on weapons and equipment which are now unaccounted for.

Number three, oil contract overcharges and contract mismanagement recently cost the U.S. Government \$263 million. Oil contract overcharges and contract mismanagement, \$263 million.

Number four, due to poor contractor oversight, a failed oil pipeline project wasted nearly \$76 million of your taxpayers' dollars.

Number five, according to an Iraqi estimate, \$5 billion per year, this is according to the Iraqi estimate, \$5 billion per year is wasted due to widespread corruption in Iraq.

Number six, after allocating \$17 billion in U.S. funds to the security and justice reconstruction sectors in Iraq, only four of those, 18 of those sectors, only four have transferred to Iraqi control.

This quarter's report also included a financial review of large contractors funded by the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund. International Bechtel is the largest Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund contractor, and there were many examples of waste and fraud and abuse discovered in that report when analyzing the Bechtel contracts.

This report analyzed 24 job orders that Bechtel contracted to perform at a total cost to the government of \$761.2 million. Of those 24 job orders, only 11 were successfully completed, 10 were incomplete, canceled or transferred to someone else, and the other three, they could not determine status of.

You see that there are many, many problems in Iraq. I think that the American people have figured out that we have some serious, serious problems over there, not only with the policy as it relates to how we keep ourselves secure, but also to our involvement over there and our spending of, as Mr. ROSS has shown you, \$135 billion on an annual basis.

That is \$16 million an hour, \$2.5 billion a week, \$135 billion a year; and we seem to, in many cases, send that over there without asking a lot of questions about where the money is being spent and what we are getting for it. At the same time, we talk about vetoing an SCHIP bill which is \$7 billion a year, which will go to cover 10 million additional children in the United States of America. I think we have just lost our way in terms of priorities.

I want to wind up by telling our viewing audience that recently I took a trip to Iraq. It was my first visit over there. I led a congressional delegation of five Members, three of whom had never been before and two, it had been several years since they had been. It was a bipartisan delegation, a great group of Members to work with.

We spent several days in the region, one full day in Baghdad. We found that morale of our Armed Forces, our uniformed personnel over there is very strong and very high. I am proud of that, having served, having worn the uniform of this country in Vietnam and served in an era when morale wasn't so high and we lost the support of the American people.

It was refreshing to me to see that our morale is pretty high over there. I think our soldiers are performing what they are being asked to do. They are performing it very well.

What I discovered is that what we are doing over there is policing the streets of Baghdad and refereeing a civil war in Iraq. That's not an appropriate role for the United States military. We don't even allow our military to police our streets here in America.

This role has to be turned over to the Iraqi people. General Petraeus told us that we can train security forces, and we can get them in place, and we can train them, but unless the Iraqi Government can stand up and give them the command and control that they need and the logistical support that they need to be effective, they never will be effective. The Iraqi Government has failed at this point in time to stand up because they are fighting each over their sectarian differences, and we have to come to grips with that.

I will close with that it kind of brought all this into focus for me and how out of kilter we have gotten on things. One of the briefings we have shown was a video that was taken in a fighter plane. I don't know what the cost of that Air Force plane was. It was probably maybe a quarter of a billion dollars, very expensive plane, delivered probably \$50,000 to \$100,000 worth of munitions to two Iraqis riding a bicycle out of a house.

I thought to myself that we have really lost focus on what our great military is supposed to be used for. We should redirect our resources into a strategy which will provide long-term security for us around the world. That strategy has to be developed, well thought out, obviously, developed through a great deal of diplomacy, a great deal of political acumen and also the appropriate leverage of our great military that we have.

I want to thank Mr. ROSS for putting together this Special Order, but also for the many other Special Orders that you have done to try to deliver the Blue Dog message to the American people. I want to thank you for your service.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BOYD), the administrative cochair of the Blue Dogs for his insight and examples of waste, fraud and abuse that's going on with your tax money over in Iraq.

If you have got any comments or concerns or questions of us, you can e-mail us at bluedog@mail.house.gov. That is bluedog@mail.house.gov.

Again, this is an hour where most Tuesday evenings we come and lead a discussion about accountability and fiscal discipline in our government by the Blue Dog Coalition.

If you are wondering how in the world did we get our name, Blue Dog Coalition, a lot of folks, especially in the South, have heard of a Yellow Dog Democrat, meaning you would vote for a Democrat even if it was a yellow dog as long as it was running as a Democrat. Somewhere along the way we were Yellow Dog Democrats that felt we were being choked blue by the extremes of both parties. Thus the name the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of fiscally conservative, commonsense Democrats that are trying to restore fiscal discipline and accountability to our government.

At this time I am pleased to turn this thing over to a former policy cochair of the Blue Dogs, the gentleman from Tennessee, JIM COOPER.

□ 1900

Mr. COOPER. I thank my colleague from Arkansas.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to join this Blue Dog Special Order hour tonight. I would like to discuss not only the War-time Spending Accountability Act but also another measure that most of the Blue Dog leadership has been kind enough to cosponsor having to do with reform of all of our entitlement programs.

But first on wartime spending, there is absolutely no question that there's been an astonishing amount of waste, fraud and abuse in this conflict in Iraq. I personally was on the tarmac at the Baghdad Airport when a C-130 plane flew in, and the Air Force did not want us to see that plane land and unload its cargo. Well, why was that? Here are a group of U.S. Congressman standing on the runway and they did not want us to

see a U.S. plane land because of its cargo. Well, what was in that plane that was so secret? Well, the plane landed and they got the forklift out and they unloaded six pallets, very well wrapped up, absolutely full, very heavy. And what was in those pallets? \$1.2 billion of U.S. cold hard cash, \$100 bills. I've never seen that much money in my life. I'm not sure if any bank in the country keeps that much cash on hand. But that much U.S. currency was flown into Baghdad. Why? We were told it was to go to replenish the Baghdad or Iraqi Central Bank. It certainly had the most elaborate convoy I've ever seen protecting that cash, because if it had been robbed, it would have been the greatest robbery in the history of the world. Now, the tragedy is we don't know how much of that money disappeared once it got to the bank and was in proper hands, because it is widely known that there is massive corruption in that country.

Another incident that most people know about is the fact that U.S. contractors, who are supposed to be handling taxpayer money wisely, have been seen playing touch football with what, a football? No. With small bales of \$100 bills. They've been so loose with our money, and they have so much on hand, not in single dollar form, but in bales of \$100 bills, that they've been seen playing touch football with that.

Another episode we were recently made aware of is due to the Iraqi Government's inability to pass an oil revenue sharing law. There's been a lot of upset by the Sunnis in al-Anbar province in particular because they're worried they won't get their fair share of Iraq's oil wealth.

Well, recently a shipment was made of millions and millions of U.S. dollars to basically dump this money in a town square in al-Anbar province just to make sure the Sunnis felt better about themselves. That is not a wise use of U.S. taxpayer dollars.

So the Inspector General in Iraq is doing an outstanding job of ferreting out this misuse of U.S. taxpayer money. We have tried here in the House of Representatives on a bipartisan basis to strengthen inspectors general. They are a wonderful mechanism for ferreting out waste, fraud and abuse. We passed a bill to strengthen inspectors general in this House by a vote of 404-11, an overwhelming bipartisan majority. And guess what the administration response was? They threatened to veto that bill. Veto a bill that enjoyed the support of 404 House Members, overwhelming bipartisan support.

I think we need to keep on strengthening inspectors general because they are finding problems with U.S. taxpayer dollars, and we need to root out all this waste, fraud and abuse.

The other topic I wanted to focus on tonight is a different measure. And as important as the war in Iraq is, as important as it is to find misspent U.S. dollars, this topic is even bigger. This

has to do with overall U.S. entitlement spending. And the proposal is H.R. 3654. We call it the SAFE Act. What it would do, and my bipartisan cosponsor is FRANK WOLF of Virginia. David Broder actually commented on this bill in his national column today in the newspaper. What it would do is set up a bipartisan commission to study the problem of entitlements for 1 year, then by the time the next President is sworn in, give that new President a commission recommendation that's completely bipartisan, a 50/50 commission. All issues are on the table, so there's no favoritism, no exclusion of certain hot-button issues. And Congress would be required to vote up or down on the finding of that commission as well as on any proposal that the new President or this Congress would like to make.

But the key is, this commission would have teeth. Congress would have to act. Reforms would have to take place, because if you look at our overall entitlement spending, there are severe problems.

According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Medicare alone, which is one of the most important programs in America, Medicare alone is \$32 trillion in the hole. \$32 trillion. That's many times larger of course than even \$32 billion. This is \$32 trillion. And their estimate is, if we knew how to measure it, that Medicaid would be in a similar bind. That's probably more than this Congress can handle in terms of problem solving this late in the session, so that's why we think that a bipartisan commission will do the best job and the fairest job and the most bipartisan job of coming up with a solution that we can all support to solve these fundamental fiscal problems.

So I would encourage my colleagues to look at H.R. 3654, the SAFE Act, to try to remedy the entitlement crisis that we face in this country. A wide group of folks from all sides of the political spectrum have supported this measure: the Bipartisan Concord Coalition, for example, the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, the Heritage Foundation on the right and the Brookings Foundation, which is more of a nonpartisan organization. So we have wide bipartisan support from the think tanks. We have wide bipartisan support in this body, with some 25 Members from each side of the aisle cosponsoring the measure already. So I hope most of my colleagues can see their way clear to going ahead and cosponsoring H.R. 3654.

But I want to thank my colleague from Arkansas, as my friend from Florida has said earlier, you've taken the lead on many weeks now to bring the message of the Blue Dogs to the American people, that message of fiscal conservatism, that message of centrism, that message of common sense and trying to do what's right for our country.

We're fortunate in the Blue Dogs to have members from all corners of the country, from California to Maine, from Florida to Washington, it's a wide

and diverse group, and we're proud of that. But the most important thing is the common sense we try to bring to these debates, because these shouldn't be highly partisan debates. Most Americans can agree when they get around the kitchen table or meet at the Rotary Club back home on what the right thing to do is for the country. We should show a similar amount of common sense here in Washington. So I thank my colleague from Arkansas, Mr. ROSS, for holding this important Special Order.

Mr. ROSS. I thank my colleague and former policy cochair for the Blue Dogs from Tennessee, Mr. COOPER, for his insight on not only Iraq war spending but these other fiscal responsibilities, trying to restore fiscal responsibility to our government and those issues surrounding that.

You mentioned Medicare. Medicare is health insurance for, basically, it's the only form of health insurance most seniors have to either stay healthy or get well, not to be confused with Medicaid, which is health insurance for the poor, the disabled, and the elderly.

Your bill, as you discuss the entitlement programs and find ways to put an end to these deficits, I applaud you for trying to do this in a bipartisan manner and having support on both sides of the aisle.

Do you have any other examples you'd like to share with us on this legislation?

Mr. COOPER. Well, we probably should mention the meeting that you and I had with all the other Blue Dogs with three remarkably distinguished Americans this afternoon because they, too, gave us some insight in our current fiscal situation in this country. I don't think you've mentioned this before earlier in the hour, but former Secretary of Treasury Bob Rubin came to meet with us, as well as former Secretary of Treasury Larry Summers, as well as former Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Roger Altman. One of our group called them actually the dream team of treasury management in recent American history, because under Secretary Rubin, Summers and Altman, we had 8 of the greatest years of growth in all of American history, certainly the longest sustained period since World War II. It was an amazing performance, an amazing feat, one that I hope that future treasury secretaries can try to live up to.

But the key was sound fiscal management. Secretary Rubin in particular set the tone by making sure that the markets in this country were strong, making sure that growth was strong, making sure that prosperity was strong. So it was an amazing thing to hear these three gentlemen.

And they're very concerned today because, unlike the surpluses that were being accumulated in the Clinton administration, especially in the last 3 years, now, of course we've sunk into terrible deficits. And they basically told us today that our number one

problem is a lack of savings in this country, a lack of personal savings, because the average American is having trouble paying their bills, doesn't put anything away for a rainy day, too tempted by credit cards, have to buy things. And now the Christmas season is coming up so there's a lack of personal savings, but there's also a huge lack of government savings, because when you run a large deficit, as we're doing, that's dissavings. That's the opposite of savings. So they pointed out that both things are problems for this country.

And I know the gentleman also enjoyed their presentation. It was quite an honor for the Blue Dogs to have them ask us to share a few thoughts with them. And they are promoting, of course, their Hamilton Project, which is a centrist think tank here in Washington supported by these gentlemen and others to try to bring more common sense to Washington policy debates and economics.

But I thank the gentleman for referring to those issues.

Mr. ROSS. It was a fascinating discussion, and you raise a good point, and that is that it wasn't too long ago that Members of Congress were coming to this floor to debate how to spend a budget surplus, how to invest a budget surplus. You know, it was under President Clinton. I'm proud to say it was a fellow Arkansan from my home town of Hope, Arkansas, where I grew up and graduated high school, who gave us the first balanced budget of any Democrat or Republican President for the first time in what, 40 years?

Mr. COOPER. Since 1969.

Mr. ROSS. And he did that. There were several contributing factors that allowed him to be able to lead us in that direction, one of which was having what's called PAYGO rules on the floor of this very House, something the Republican leadership threw out the door with this new Republican President back in 2001. And what PAYGO rules mean is it means pay as you go. PAYGO is an acronym for pay as you go, which means exactly what it sounds like it means. If you've got an idea for a new program that's going to cost money, you've got to show how you're going to pay for it. No more of just borrowing money from China. If you want to cut taxes for folks earning over \$400,000 a year, you've got to show how you're going to pay for it. No more borrowing money from China.

And I'm proud to tell you that in this new Democratic Congress, there's a lot of discussion about the first 100 legislative hours where we raised the Federal minimum wage and where we implemented the 9/11 Commission recommendations, where we said Members of Congress who break the law will no longer receive a pension, where we passed earmark reform, where we have passed SCHIP to ensure that the children of working parents receive health care. We've done a lot in this session of Congress. Unfortunately, a lot of it is

sitting over on the Senate's doorsteps waiting for Senate action, which is somewhat disappointing for a lot of us that come here every week and work hard to pass these policy initiatives that are good for working families, good for children and good for seniors.

But not in the first legislative 100 hours, not in the first 9 months of this new 110th Congress under a Democratic majority, but in the first hour on this very floor of the United States House of Representatives, this new Democratic Congress reinstituted a House rule known as PAYGO.

You want to expand on that?

Mr. COOPER. Well, the gentleman's exactly right. An authority of no less than Alan Greenspan said that PAYGO was the most important reform that this Congress could undertake to right our fiscal imbalance.

PAYGO was actually started under the first President Bush in 1990. It was instituted on a bipartisan basis. It worked extremely well for 12 years, from 1990 to 2002. And then sadly the Republican majority here allowed it to expire. And that's when, really, our fiscal wheels started running off the track.

So we swung from a surplus, a surplus that was growing so fast there was actually fear that the United States would be debt free, as if you could be afraid of that, that would have been a glorious moment in our history for our children to be unburdened by interest payments and future generations. That was the prospect when President Clinton left office.

And then to swing from that into, as all Blue Dogs have, we have the debt sign outside of our office. Now it's \$9 billion, \$29,000 for every man, woman and child in this country. But it's growing so rapidly. And that doesn't even take into account our Medicare, our Social Security, our Medicaid and other entitlement program liabilities. So it's a monster of a problem, and it's going to take a bipartisan commission to deal with it.

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But PAYGO, according to Alan Greenspan and other authorities, was the single most important reform step that we could undertake. The Blue Dogs are responsible for that reform. It's working. I am proud of our Democratic leadership here because they have been remarkably strict in making sure that every bill that reaches this House floor adheres to PAYGO requirements.

And as you said, it is completely common sense. If you want something new, pay for it. Don't charge it. And that is the way America needs to be acting in the future.

So I think it will not inhibit new ideas. It will just make sure that new ideas are fiscally responsible and paid for so we are not adding to the debt load of our kids and grandkids, and, as the gentleman said, not borrowing any more money from foreign countries,

because we've done too much of that already.

Many Americans don't realize that President Bush, his administration, has already borrowed more money from foreign nations than all previous Presidents in American history put together. What a sad record to hold, to have borrowed more money from foreign nations than all previous Presidents in American history combined. That's not good medicine for America. That's not good fiscal policy. And the Blue Dogs are leading the way in helping to change that.

Mr. ROSS. That is a national security issue, in my opinion, Mr. COOPER. What if those countries decide to call those loans? What does that mean? The "dream team," Mr. Rubin and the others told us today what it meant, and I think you asked the question. And it means higher interest rates. They will have to raise interest rates in this country to where it's attractive for other countries to buy our paper, to buy our money. That is, I think, directly a threat to our national security.

And to put it in perspective, the total national debt from 1789 through 2000 was \$5.67 trillion. But by 2010, the total national debt will have increased to \$10.88 trillion under this Republican President's administration and under his budgets that he sends to Congress. This is a doubling, a doubling, of the 211-year debt in just 10 years. Interest payments on this debt are one of the fastest-growing parts of the Federal budget, and the debt tax is one that cannot be repealed. For every man, woman, and child in this country, you take the national debt and divide by the number of people. It is about \$29,000 per person. And that is one tax that cannot be cut until we get our Nation's fiscal house in order.

Our Nation, under this Republican President's budget, is borrowing about a billion dollars a day. But before we borrow another billion dollars a day, we are spending about a half billion paying interest on the debt we have already got.

This puts it in perspective. Interest payments on debt dwarf other priorities, the 2008 budget authority in the billions of dollars. The red box is the amount of money, your tax money, Mr. Speaker, that is going to pay interest on the national debt, to repay the loans to places like Japan and China and the United Kingdom and OPEC and Korea and Taiwan and the Caribbean Banking Centers and Hong Kong and Germany and Mexico.

We talk a lot about education. We talk about how we want our children to receive a world-class education. But the turquoise box, this box, Mr. Speaker, reflects how much of your tax money is going to educate our children compared with the amount going in the red to pay interest on the national debt.

We say we want to keep our promises to our veterans. We say we want to provide our veterans with world-class

health care and housing and education when they return home. But in the green box, Mr. Speaker, you will see the amount of money we're spending on our veterans compared to the red box, the amount of money being spent on interest on the national debt.

And, finally, the purple box, homeland security. Now, I came here in 2001. The first 9 months of 2001, I don't think I ever heard the word "homeland security" mentioned once. But that is now a household name, a household phrase, a household word. Homeland security. It make us feel good. We go through the metal detectors at the airport and we feel safer. We take our shoes off and I always take my pen out of my pocket, and we feel safer. And what most of us don't know is about half the belly of a plane is not your suitcase that you saw X-rayed. It's freight, freight that continues to go unchecked. About one out of every 100 containers that enter our ports, five out of every 100 containers, maybe 10 out of every 100 containers that enter our ports are checked.

And what about the food we put in our body? Mr. Speaker, for all the seafood and fruits and vegetables that come into this country from other countries by way of port, do you know how many FDA inspectors there are at those ports? Not per port. But for all the ports in America. For all the seafood, fruits, and vegetables coming into America from all over the world, there are about 70 FDA inspectors. Not per port, not per shift, not counting the ones that aren't sick or on vacation. There are 70 total. Homeland security, the purple box, this is how much we are really investing in protecting our homeland. And that is why a recent nonpartisan assessment indicated that we are less safe today in America than we were on September 11, 2001.

These priorities, education, veterans, homeland security, will continue to go unmet until we get our Nation's fiscal house in order.

Deficits matter. They reduce economic growth. They burden our children and grandchildren with liabilities. They increase our reliance on foreign lenders who, as Mr. COOPER pointed out, now own 40 percent of our debt. That's right. Our Nation, the U.S., is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign lenders. Foreign lenders currently hold a total of \$2.199 trillion of our public debt. Compare that to only \$623.3 billion in foreign holdings in 1993. It's kind of like David Letterman and his top 10 list. The top 10 countries, this Republican administration, this Republican Congress for the past 6 years time after time after time has borrowed money from foreigners to fund tax cuts in this country for folks earning over \$400,000 a year.

And whom have we borrowed the money from? Japan, \$637.4 billion; China, \$346.5 billion; United Kingdom, \$223.5 billion; OPEC, \$97.1 billion; Korea, \$67.7 billion; Taiwan, \$63.2 billion; Caribbean Banking Centers, \$63.6

billion; Hong Kong, \$51 billion; Germany, \$52.1 billion.

And rounding out my version of David Letterman's top 10 list, the 10th country that we have borrowed the most money from, number 10 on the list, all this debate these days about immigration policies, and I think we do need to secure the border and I think that we should have those who want to come here and live among us play by the rules, respect our laws, learn English, respect our flag. I believe those things. No amnesty, as Mr. Reagan gave us during his years in office. We learned that doesn't work. But rounding out the top 10, while everybody is focused on immigration: Mexico. The United States of America has borrowed \$38.2 billion from Mexico to fund tax cuts in this country for folks earning over \$400,000 a year. Those are the facts.

I am pleased to be joined by a fellow Blue Dog from the State of North Carolina, Mr. MIKE MCINTYRE.

I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. MCINTYRE. Thank you, Congressman ROSS, for yielding and thank you for leading this discussion, a very important one, to show the Blue Dogs' commitment to common sense with regard to the American taxpayers' dollar.

And I want to focus, in the few moments we have left, on our commitment to helping business, American businesses, that provide jobs. We know that the Blue Dog Coalition has tried to do everything it could to help our businesses, especially small business, as many of our districts we know look to small business to help that economic engine churn. Indeed, 99 percent of all business is small business. And when we talk about that, it means that we have an opportunity to work with businesses who help to provide better health care for their employees, who also help people to pursue their dreams and provide college education for their children, who help their family members with their personal needs and through our small businesses who help not only with charitable contributions in their communities but community leadership, civic engagement, and a myriad of other positive activities that affect the American family and, indeed, our American communities.

I want to talk about for a moment how we are doing that in very specific ways when we look at prosperity and the protection and the progress we have made in trying to help small business. And what it means is that we use a commonsense approach when it comes to our checkbook, that we don't spend more money than we have, than any of us would do in our own checkbook. And there are three specific ways that I want to remind us this year that the Blue Dogs have sought to do this. And that is through a package that we introduced a few months ago and are continuing to work on that has different ways that we can put together legislation to restore fiscal discipline to the Federal Government after years

of budgetary mismanagement and irresponsible deficit spending.

The first part of this legislation is the Blue Dog fiscal accountability package. It is the opportunity for us to be able to strengthen fiscal responsibility and accountability by making sure we do follow the statutory PAYGO rules, or pay-as-you-go, a commonsense term that our leadership has adopted to make sure that we are implementing multiyear discretionary spending caps. This would make sure that we are not spending any more of the taxpayer dollars than we have in our budget, that we get out of the habit of running up the national debt.

And as you pointed out earlier tonight, right now the national debt stands at a figure that means about \$29,888 for every man, woman, and child in America. And that is totally unacceptable.

The second part of our legislative package, in addition to making sure we have accountability and honesty in our budgeting, is the Balanced Budget amendment, which so many of us have supported, to provide a constitutional amendment requiring Congress to balance the Federal budget every year. This legislation allows for flexibility during times of war, natural disaster, or economic downturn by giving Congress the ability to waive the balanced budget requirement with a three-fifths vote in the House and Senate. And it also prohibits cuts in Social Security benefits from ever being used in order to balance the budget. So it protects our senior citizens as well.

We have got to make sure that we are paying down this national debt. It's not fair to mortgage our children's future. It's not fair to mortgage our grandchildren's future. It's not fair to put a price tag on every baby born in every hospital in America of \$29,000 in debt from the second they take their first breath. And that bill is being put not only on children but on family members of all ages, even our senior citizens. That has to stop.

The third piece of legislation we have also deals with strengthening the budget process, to make sure the Members of Congress have a sufficient amount of time to properly examine legislation and its actual cost implications, to make sure there is transparency in the process and requiring the Congressional Budget Office to have a cost estimate accompany any bill or conference report that comes to the House floor.

And, Mr. Speaker, these are only practical ways that the Blue Dogs are seeking to make sure we have honesty, transparency, and common sense in our budgetary process. The central guiding battle cry that we as Blue Dogs have is make sure that we are accountable and make sure that the taxpayers' dollar is only being used in the most fiscally responsible way, as any of us would want done with our own money. After all, it is the taxpayers' dollars, and that is to whom we are accountable and want to honor.

Thank you for this opportunity to address this to my colleague, and, Mr. Speaker, it is about prosperity for the American Dream. It is about protecting the American taxpayers' dollars and about making sure that we are working together for progress in our society.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from North Carolina.

In the remaining four or five minutes we have, I want to turn this over to one of the founders, one of the long-time leaders of the fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition, and that is my friend from Iowa, Mr. LEONARD BOSWELL.

Mr. BOSWELL. Thank you, MIKE. I appreciate my friend from Arkansas giving me this opportunity. And I want to compliment you for the untiring hours you've spent in trying to tell this Nation, this Congress, and all who will listen that it is time to be fiscally responsible. It has been for some time.

And I would like to associate myself with my friend from North Carolina in the comments he just made. Very, very germane to what is going on in our country today. In fact, around the world. And as you can tell, Mr. ROSS, I am one of the older folks around here. I don't know if that's something I should be proud of. I guess I'm proud versus the alternative. But oftentimes people say to me, You're going to be all right. Why are you worried about it so much?

Well, I am worried about it. Yes, at my age I suppose I'm going to be all right. But you know what? I have children and I have grandchildren and I am very proud of them, and I want them to have the opportunities.

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In fact, just like you and you and you and anybody else that's paying attention, we all want it better for our children, that's just inherent. And they're not going to have that opportunity if we don't do something about this. And that's what you display right there on that chart.

That figure of \$9 trillion-plus is staggering, and it's growing; it has been for the last number of years. And we went from the opportunity of being in a surplus to this unbelievable deficit situation. And it really ties our hands as to what we can do as we think about our leadership in the world we know today.

This very day I'm quite sure that we've had people from our Treasury Department over in China trying to borrow money so we can continue to run on deficit, and this just won't work. You can't do your business in Arkansas, you can't do it in North Carolina, I can't do it in Iowa, nobody can.

There comes a time when you have to face reality. And Mr. Stenholm used to tell us from time to time that if you realize you're in trouble and going into a hole, the first thing you do is quit digging. And there is something to that. Well, we need to do it, and we need to do it badly.

So, I am pleased to associate with the Blue Dog Coalition, I have been for some time, and the leadership that Mr. ROSS and others, Mr. BOYD and others, have given to trying to make this point come to life in the sense that we've got to do it for our country and for our kids and our grandkids. This is something we must do, and there is just no choice about it.

I think there is a lot of hope for us in the world that we're living in today. I have a lot of hope, and I want to keep it that way. At the same time, I'm fully aware from my travels and from my life experience that the world is in a perilous situation. And we won't always be in this leadership position if we don't take a hold and get our arms around this situation. But we've got to do it.

And as we well know, the time is now at hand, I think it's already here, that China is a superpower. They are certainly going to be if they're not; I think they probably are. India, the demands they're putting on us. The big trade deficits we've got, we can't sustain those. And you put all this in line with this tremendous debt we have and what we're paying for interest annually, it equates to something like \$250 billion a year. It equates to one of our major line items for our department. We can't afford to do that, and we have to face reality.

So, I really appreciate the efforts being made by you, Mike, and all of us to try to do something about this, and the fact that the leadership of this Congress has accepted our idea of PAYGO. And it's something we have decided upon and we've got to stick to it. There are going to be a lot of temptations to vary from that. And as we went into the farm bill, for example, it was so hard to do it, but we stuck with it, we worked hard and we came up with a viable solution. We've got to do it in all the things that lay before us. We've got to set the priorities and get those things done.

I see the time is about up. So I yield back to you, Mr. ROSS, for the closing comment, if you would like. I just want to say I appreciate coming here this evening and sharing some of my concerns for this situation at hand. We have to take it as a real situation. It's here. And if we don't do our job, we're going to leave it on our children and our grandchildren, and we don't want to do that.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Iowa.

The gentleman from North Carolina.

Mr. BOSWELL. Just the last word I'll say is we always want to remember it's the taxpayers' money. It's not Washington's money, it's not the government's money, it's the taxpayers' money, and we want to do everything we can to make sure that everything is honored. That's the Blue Dogs' battle cry, and that's where we stand. And I thank you for this opportunity to share in this.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, this evening you've heard from Blue Dog members

from Kansas, Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina, Iowa and Arkansas. And we're a group of 47 fiscally conservative Democrats that are simply trying to restore common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's Government as we try to offer up commonsense, practical ways to put an end to this reckless spending and hold this government accountable for how your tax money is being spent.

HEALTH CARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the privilege to address you here on the floor of the United States House of Representatives.

And having been a speaker in waiting, I had the privilege to listen to some of the Blue Dogs talk about their budgetary priorities. And I also listened to the reflection of the individual from Iowa, whose cows I represent down there in my territory. And we are good neighbors and we've worked together over the last 5 years that I have been in this Congress.

There always are two sides to an issue, and a number of the statements that were made here I absolutely agree with. I would submit, though, that there is a distinction between us, and that is, I want a balanced budget. I worked for a balanced budget. I called for a balanced budget upon my arrival in this Congress 5 years ago. I've sought to produce those numbers and get that language out on the floor.

My Blue Dog friends also call for a balanced budget, but they're willing to raise the taxes. And they have offered several budgets to this Congress that would have raised taxes in order to balance this budget.

I would submit that we need to balance the budget a different way. We need to do it by controlling spending. And we can do a better job of controlling discretionary spending, but in there is not the answer, not the complete answer to the things that we need to do.

The tax cuts that came from the Bush administration immediately following September 11, 2001, and the next wave of tax cuts that we did in 2003 have stimulated this economy, and they have probably kept us from a recession and maybe even a depression. So, Mr. Speaker, I would submit this: I would take your reflection back to that period of time that was in the end of the Clinton administration, during the campaign of the Bush-Gore campaign in the year 1999 and 2000 and the beginning of the Bush administration. We had this growing, booming economy, and it coupled with serious spending cuts that were brought forth on the floor of this Congress by Republican leadership, the new Republican leadership that arrived here, elected in 1994, sworn in here in the first week of January of 1995, and came in and said, we're